



Public Health

Seattle & King County

HEALTHY PEOPLE. HEALTHY COMMUNITIES.

Dorothy F. Teeter, MHA, *Interim Director and Health Officer*

CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING FACT SHEET

1. What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous and odorless gas that cannot be seen or smelled and that can kill a person in minutes. Carbon monoxide is produced whenever any fuel such as gas, oil, kerosene, wood, or charcoal is burned. If appliances that burn fuel are maintained and used properly, the amount of carbon monoxide produced is usually not hazardous. Hundreds of people die accidentally every year from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by appliances that are not used properly or that are malfunctioning. Even more people die from carbon monoxide produced from idling cars. Carbon monoxide can build up so quickly that victims are overcome before they can get help.

Once inhaled, carbon monoxide:

- Decreases the capacity of blood to carry oxygen;
- Can cause permanent brain damage;
- Can cause chest pains or heart attacks in people with heart disease.

2. What are the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning?

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Confusion
- Nausea

3. How can I prevent carbon monoxide poisoning?

- Never burn charcoal inside homes, tents, campers, vans, trucks, garages, or mobile homes. Do not burn charcoal in the fireplace in your home.
- Never use gasoline powered equipment **indoors**. "**Adequate ventilation**" is required when using gasoline powered equipment. It can be difficult to determine how much ventilation is "adequate"; **therefore, always use this kind of equipment outdoors!**
- Never use a gas oven to heat your home, even for a short time.
- Never idle a car in a garage, even when the garage door is open.
- Never sleep in a room while using an unvented gas or kerosene heater.
- Make sure that chimneys and flues are in good condition and are not blocked.
- Have oil and gas appliances and fireplaces as well as wood stoves checked every year by a trained professional.
- Carbon monoxide warning devices may provide additional protection, but should not replace the other prevention steps.

4. What should be done if you suspect someone has been poisoned by carbon monoxide?

- Move the person to a place with fresh air **immediately**.
- Take the person to an emergency room and tell them that you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning.

Office of the Director

999 Third Avenue, Suite 1200 · Seattle, WA 98104-4039

T 206-296-4600 F 206-296-0166 TTY Relay: 711

www.metrokc.gov/health

